# Working with Parents and Families to Build Social Competence

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# OVERVIEW

Why?

How?

Who?

What?

Takeaways for Teachers!

# Post-High School Transition

Employment

Quality Of Life



- Taking on Adult Roles
- Personal Fulfillment
- Physical and Material Well-Being

(Halpern, 1993)

# Employment

- Persistently Low Employment Levels
McDonnall (2010) reported employment rates for youth with visual impairments at 38.2%, compared to 76.2% for those youth in the general population.

- Ripple Effect
2012 Adult employment rate: 36.8% (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2012).

# Quality of Life

Despite educational attainment and instruction in disability-specific skills, youth with visual impairments continue to demonstrate high unemployment and delayed transitions to adult roles.

(Blackorby & Wagner, 1995; Janus, 2009; McDonnall, 2010; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005; Wells, Sandefur, & Hogan, 2003)

# Rationale for Study

- *The National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities* (Huebner, Merk-Adam, & Wolffe, 2004) .

- Social skills have impact well beyond childhood and the classroom (Sacks & Wolffe, 2006).

- Significant correlations between social skills and employment for these youth (Botsford, 2013; McDonnall, 2011; Monson, 2009).

# STUDY DESIGN

Phenomenology

Focus-Groups

Frequencies

Triangulation

# PARTICIPANTS

Education

Employment

Independence

Personal Relationships

# Demographics

| Statistic | Age | Years Employed |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Range | 26 to 61 | 2 to 35 |
| Mode | 26.00 | 2.00 |
| Mean | 41.64 | 13.36 |
| SD | 11.73 | 10.48 |

# Demographics

| Gender | Employment Status | Employer Type | Education |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male $N$ = 8 | 3 FT Paid | 9 Private Agency | 1 HS Graduate |
| Female $N$ = 6 | 3 PT Volunteer | 4 Government | 3 Some College |
| | 1 Retired | 1 School District | 5 Bachelors |
| | | | 5 Graduate School |

# Interview Questions

1. How do you define "Social Competence" or "Social Skills"?

2. How do different communication strategies impact you at work?

3. What are your experiences with talking to employers or coworkers about your vision impairment?

4. Please discuss your experiences with accepting and refusing assistance.

5. Do you recall someone talking to you about social skills?

# RESULTS
Themes

- Influence of Parents and Families
    - Social Competence Starts at Home

- Contextually Appropriate Behavior
    - Discrete Social Skills
    - Communication Techniques

- Blindness Identity

# Parent & Family Influence

Glenn (age 33):

Family can be part of the solution, but it's so easy for them to become part of the problem.  I love a good steak dinner . . . .  I mentioned this is because three or four years after training I happened to be sitting in a restaurant with my mother. Three or four years of having these in-depth conversations with my mother regarding my blindness, and how valuable I find independence, and demonstrating it to her through daily actions . . .

I was sitting at a restaurant with her, I ordered a steak, it arrived, and she offered to cut it up for me. I remember feeling extraordinarily hurt. This was very emotionally upsetting for me. . . because I felt like I had been doing my utmost. I thought we had very open, very clear communication about where I felt my independent skills were, that we were on the same page.

(Cimarolli, 2006; Cimarolli & Boerner, 2005; Cimarolli, Reinhardt, & Horowitz, 2006; Guerette & Smedema, 2011; Nyman, Gosney, & Victor, 2010)

Nancy (age 54):

My parents never thought I didn't need to learn something just because I had limited sight. I was expected to be socially appropriate in the same way that my sisters were. I'm very glad I had that foundation because I think it allowed me to move into adult life as a blind person needing mostly only to work on the technique of blindness. I had the basics and that made it much easier [for me] than for some other people I've talked to who didn't have the same foundation.

# Social Competence Starts at Home

Ken (age 51):

I think social skills for blind people start at home. You have to be taught to be normal just like everybody else . . . Parents have to make you do everything that everybody else does. In my house, you did not say *can't.* If you said *can't* you were in big trouble . . . .

# Overprotection

Sara (age 41):

Parents who are either extremely overprotective, and will not let their children experience a variety of things so they can grow socially, or they will excuse their child and say, "It's okay, he doesn't have to be polite.  He can eat like that if he wants to."  If the school, or staff, or other folks try to correct [rude behavior], and there's no consistency between the parents and the teachers, then it gets really bad. The child suffers because he ends up developing rude behaviors.

# Influence of Friendships

Laura (age 53):

I have a couple of experiences that still stick in my mind from friends. When I was in first grade I used to eat with my mouth open.  I wouldn't close my mouth.  I was at lunch and my friend, one of my good friends, said to me, "You can't eat that way.  That's terrible" I still remember it because I was so embarrassed, and I never did it again.

(Kef & Dekovic, 2004; Ladd, 2006; Peavey & Leff, 2002; Rosenblum, 1998)

# Contextually Appropriate

Discrete Social Skills

1. Basic manners

2. Analyzing social contexts

3. Showing respect to others

4. Considering the feelings of others

5. Demonstrating appropriate behavior

6. Personal appearance

(Golub, 2003, 2006;  Sacks & Wolffe, 2006)

# Communication Techniques

After reemphasizing *contextually appropriate behavior*, additional skills include:

1. Using non-verbal communication

2. Putting others at ease

3. "Fitting-in"

4. Having a sense of humor

# Blindness Identity

1. Interpersonal sensitivity

2. Humor as a tool to diffuse others' pre- or misconceptions of blindness

3. Personal self-control in the face of stereotyping or discrimination.

4. Willingness to persevere or "prove yourself" without becoming defensive or angry

# Impact of Behavior on "Blind" Community

If I'm totally obnoxious, which I can be, obviously (laughs), then what's going to happen if there's some blind person out there who is flailing and lost?  Is the *sighted person* going to be more or less apt to help? I mean, hello?  After some blind guy was just going off on 'em?  They're not even going to want to talk to another blind guy.
(Ken, age 51)

If somebody asks if you need assistance, or they make a comment to you out of ignorance, it is so hard to be able to emotionally pull yourself back together and respond appropriately.  But, if you don't, and you want to go off on them, and let them *have it,* because what they said was not appropriate, . . . the only thing that stranger takes away from that whole conversation is "blind people are so rude!"  It never becomes about what they said [to me].
(Sara, age 41)

# TAKEAWAYS

1. Families are the primary teachers of social skills

2. Power of parent expectations

3. Opportunities and experiences are crucial for social competence

4. Positive influence of a group identify

# TAKEAWAYS FOR TEACHERS

To help children develop effective social skills teachers can focus on:

- Respect

- Education

- Connections

- Empowerment

# For Teachers

Respect

Teachers must learn, understand, and respect family cultures that may differ from those expressed by the teacher or in school.

- Values
- Expectations
- Dreams
- Fears

# For Teachers

Education

Teachers are invaluable sources of information for parents and families:

- Expanded Core Curriculum Areas
- Resources
- Expectations
- Specific Techniques for Tasks & Skills

# For Teachers

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC)
- Compensatory Academic Skills
- Social Interaction Skills
- Orientation and Mobility
- Recreation and Leisure
- Career Awareness
- Self-Determination
- Independent Living Skills
- Assistive Technology
- Sensory Efficiency Skills

(American Foundation for the Blind, n.d.; Hatlen, 1996)

# For Teachers

Education

Teachers need to provide information in many ways:
- Phone
  - E-mail
    - Text
      - Tweets
        - Social Media
          - Face-to-face
            - Newsletters

# For Teachers

Education

- Teachers need to provide information to parents many times through a child's school career

- Teach families about blindness/ vision impairments

# For Teachers

Connections

Families learn from other families

- Parent organizations
- Consumer organizations
- Internet resources
- State-sponsored programs
- Summer programs for students
- Field trips

# For Teachers

Empowerment

- Children benefit when parents feel competent and confident in their knowledge and abilities to teach their children.

- Sometimes doing less *is* teaching.

(Dunst, 2002)

# QUESTIONS

# Thank You

- Participants
- Consumer Organizations
- Rehabilitation Agencies

- Dr. Kay A. Ferrell
- Dr. Jana Schwartz

- American Foundation for the Blind
- National Leadership Consortium on Sensory Disabilities

# Contact Information

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